

The philosophical background of the placement of four-winged mythological animal figures on the upper section of traditional Balinese architecture

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received November 01, 2025 Received in revised form Dec. 14, 2025 Accepted January 02, 2026 Available online March 01, 2026</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Himalaya Philosophical Symbolic Traditional Balinese architecture Winged mythological animal</p> <p>Corresponding author: I Nyoman Widya Paramadhyaksa Architecture Study Program, Faculty Engineering, Universitas Udayana University, Indonesia Email: paramadhyaksa@unud.ac.id ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9653-8214</p>	<p><i>This paper examines the philosophical background of four-winged mythological animal figures well known in traditional Balinese architectural art: the winged serpent, the swan, the Garuda, and the winged lion. These animal figures are carved or positioned on the upper sections of various Balinese Hindu sacred buildings. The study employs a hermeneutic method based on the symbolic meanings of each figure, combined with a literature review of the natural characteristics of the animals that inspired these animal figures. Several branches of knowledge serve as analytical approaches in this study, including Hindu cosmology and mythology; the natural characteristics of the Himalaya; the morphology of the four figures; a semiotic approach; comparative studies of similar objects; and Balinese local wisdom. The findings indicate that these four-winged mythological animals possess philosophical backgrounds shaped through syncretization between mythology and the natural characteristics of several animal species from the Himalayan region. These four-winged mythological figures also embody symbolic meanings as guardians of the heavenly realm, as vehicles of the deities, and as entities possessing the combined traits of the animals that form their composite nature. Therefore, it is appropriate that those animal figures are positioned on the upper sections of traditional Balinese buildings.</i></p>

Introduction

Traditional Balinese Hindu sacred architecture is richly endowed with a wide variety of ornamental elements imbued with symbolic meaning. These ornamental forms are strongly interrelated with the teachings of Hinduism originating from the culture and belief systems of the Himalayan region. The ornamental repertoire of these sacred structures is also conceptually connected to various forms of architectural ornamentation found in Hindu temples across different countries.

The ornamental elements of Balinese Hindu sacred buildings manifest in diverse forms, including sculptures, relief carvings, paintings, as

well as elements that are primarily ornamental and decorative in nature (Nilam 2023). These ornaments may take the form of celestial bodies, vegetation, natural elements, and beings endowed with distinctive characteristics (Gelebet 2002). Among those characterized by distinctive traits are winged mythological animals, hybrid creatures, and androgynous beings, which to date have received limited scholarly attention.

Based on observational findings and literature studies conducted, four figures of winged mythological animals have been inventoried within the art of Balinese Hindu sacred architecture. These four figures consist of: (a) the figure of a winged nāga; (b) the swan; (c) Garuda;

and (d) the figure of a winged lion. These winged mythological animal figures are positioned in various parts of Balinese Hindu sacred buildings.

This study constitutes a novel research endeavor that focuses on the philosophical background and symbolic meanings of the four-winged mythological animal figures recognized in the art of traditional Balinese architecture. The findings produced serve as fundamental guidelines that form the conceptual basis for the placement of these four animal figures within on the upper section of major Balinese Hindu sacred buildings.

Methods

This research employs a hermeneutic research method aimed at interpreting the philosophical background and symbolic meanings of the four-winged mythological animal figures in traditional Balinese Hindu sacred architecture. In conducting the interpretation, various forms of understanding are used as interpretative foundations to sharpen and deepen the analytical results (Letzter and Neuman 2022). These understandings relate to Hindu mythology and cosmology; Hindu religious teachings; representations of the natural characteristics of the Himalayan Mountains; morphological studies of sculptures and ornamental elements of Hindu sacred architecture; comparative studies of similar objects; as well as Balinese local wisdom values concerning the four-winged mythological animal figures.

Research object

There are four figures of winged mythological animal figures in the art of Balinese Hindu sacred architecture that constitute the objects of this research, namely: (a) the winged nāga figure; (b) the swan figure; (c) the Garuda figure; and (d) the winged lion figure. These four figures of winged animal figures are placed on spesific section of traditional Balinese Hindu sacred structures such as *padmasana*, *padmasari*, *meru*, *pelinggih*, and *bale kulkul*.

Other winged mythological beings, such as Wilmana and Kinnara–Kinnari, are not included within the scope of discussion in this paper. In Indian mythology, Wilmana is depicted as a winged chariot, whereas in Java and Bali, it is represented as a winged giant. Meanwhile,

Kinnara and Kinnari are known in Buddhist-influenced mythology as a celestial pair of male and female artists, depicted as human figures with the lower bodies of birds.

Technique for selecting research objects

The winged animal figures selected as the objects of this study were chosen through a purposive sampling technique, based on several considerations: the uniqueness of the figures' morphological characteristics; the types of buildings in which the figures are incorporated; the positional placement of the figures within the architectural structures; the typology of the figures' formal manifestations; and the presence of specific symbolic meanings embodied by each figure.

Literature review

There are several literature-based studies related to the four-winged mythological animals discussed in this research.

The Himalayan natural environment as the conceptual root of Hindu sacred architecture

In historical records concerning world religions, Hinduism is identified as the oldest religion in the world, originating in the region of Northern India (Thapa 2024). The teachings of this religion also encompass philosophical foundations and conceptual frameworks that are deeply rooted in the natural characteristics and cultural context of its place of origin (Dash, Narasimham, and Jinde 2024; Srinivasan and Aithal 2025). A number of mythological terms within Hindu doctrine, such as Mount Meru, Mount Kailāśa, the goddess Gaṅgā, the goddess Yamuna, and the goddess Sarasvatī, are in fact inspired by the mountains and river systems of the Himalayan range (Darian 2001). A similar condition applies to the various animals or hybrid creatures recognized in many Hindus, and even Buddhist, mythologies, including swans, peacocks, owls, tigers, lions, elephants, Garuda, Aruna, Kinnara–Kinnari, the Naga Taksaka (Takṣaka), and the bull Nandi (Hamal 2025; Murdihastomo 2021).

These Himalayan nature-inspired teachings were subsequently adopted by various civilizations that came under the cultural influence of Hinduism, as well as Buddhism, from India (Yudianto 2023). Terminologies within these teachings were phonetically adapted to local languages, thereby accelerating the process of

their naturalization within the cultures of the newly influenced regions (Srinivasan and Aithal 2025).

The symbolic meaning of Hindu sacred architecture

Hindu sacred buildings in various countries, whether in the form of mandirs in India; wats in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand; or candis and puras in Indonesia, fundamentally embody the same symbolic meanings (Choudhary 2024; Tian and Ding 2025). These sacred structures represent the symbolic embodiment of prominent cosmic sacred mountains recognized in Hindu teachings, namely Mount Meru, Mount Mandara, and Mount Kailāśa (Michell 1988; Varma 1985).

The architectural form of these sacred buildings is designed in accordance with the conceptual image of the cosmic sacred mountain. The broad and massive base of the structure symbolizes the natural expanse of the mountain foothills, corresponding to the realm of Bhurloka (the worldly realm), which is the dwelling place of humankind, fauna, and various forms of flora. The middle section, namely the body of the sacred building, is equated with the body or slope of the mountain. This section typically contains the sacred chamber (Sanskrit: *garbhagrha*), which symbolizes a natural cave within the mountain body. In Hindu cosmology, this level is known as Bhuvraloka (the transitional realm). The roof of the sacred structure is designed to rise slenderly and taper toward a single elevated point, creating an impression of sanctity, height, and inaccessibility. This uppermost part represents the mountain peak, singular and exalted, and symbolizes the realm of Svarloka (the heavenly realm) (Michell 1988; Paramadhyaksa 2009).

Across these three architectural strata of Hindu sacred buildings, various relief carvings, ornaments, and figurative representations of specific beings or entities are positioned in accordance with the level of sanctity and the depiction of their natural habitats (Bhatia et al. 2021).

Hindu mythology as inspiration for the manifestation of sacred architecture

Another body of knowledge that has also served as inspiration for the manifestation of Hindu sacred architecture consists of various mythologies or narratives situated within the realm of the deities. These mythological accounts contain teachings on virtue and moral guidance,

conveyed through sequences of events occurring in the divine realm.

Several popular Hindu mythologies that have frequently been used as inspiration for the formal articulation of sacred architecture include the mythology of the Churning of Mount Mandara; the mythology of the goddess Gangga; the mythology of Lingodbhava; the mythology of Viṣṇu Anantaśayana; and the mythology of the battle between the goddess Durga and the demon Mahiṣa.

Brief description of the Four-Winged mythological animal figures

Winged Nāga: Taksaka

The nāga is a type of reptilian creature recognized in the mythologies of various civilizations throughout the world. In Asia, nāgas tend to be depicted as large serpents in a wide range of variant forms, including giant snakes equipped with one or two pairs of legs; endowed with wings; possessing multiple heads; bearing horns; covered with thick hair; or adorned with elaborate crowns. Nāgas are portrayed as possessing characteristics closely related to serpents. They are described as long-lived beings, capable of shedding their skin, coiling their bodies, and possessing dangerous venomous fangs (Fagiolo, Ayora Estevan, and Ngomo Fernandez 2024; He 2023; Izotova 2025). Within Hindu mythology, the figure of Naga Taksaka is known as possessing the most lethal venom among the nāga race. Taksaka is described as residing in heaven, capable of flight, and able to transform into a human or semi-human form. In classical Indian culture, Taksaka is referred to merely as a nāga prince who is married (Rice 2006; Vogel 1995). His ability to fly and his dwelling in the upper realm (heaven) result in Taksaka being manifested as a winged nāga. In a segment of the narrative continuation of the *Mahabharata* epic, Taksaka is recounted as the slayer of Maharaja Parikesit (Parikṣit) of Hastina Pura.

In traditional Balinese architectural art, Taksaka is represented as a crowned nāga adorned with a pair of earrings, several body bracelets, and a principal ornament at the tip of its tail. Taksaka is depicted with a snarling facial expression that reveals sharp, venomous fangs. In addition to wings, Taksaka is commonly portrayed as possessing a pair of eagle-like legs equipped with sharp talons.

Three-dimensional representations of Taksaka are commonly found serving as ornamental armrests of throne seats placed atop sacred *padmasana* and *padmasari* structures. At Pura Goa Raja, near Pura Besakih in Karangasem, there are three consecrated nāga statues, namely Naga Anantabhoga, Wasuki, and Taksaka (Berti and Purnama 2023). Taksaka is represented as the only winged nāga statue and is distinguished by attributes of white cloth and a sacred white parasol. In this context, the nāga is connoted as a symbolization of the cloud element. The two adjacent nāgas, bearing black and red attributes and lacking wings, symbolize the elements of water and earth within the universe (Bakker 1993) (figure 1).



Figure 1. Naga Taksaka at Pura Goa Raja, Besakih, and the figure of Naga Taksaka in Padmasana sacred architecture

Swan

Within Hindu teachings, the swan is recognized as a sacred bird imbued with numerous symbolic meanings associated with the concept of purity. The swan is also known as the *vāhana* (vehicle) of the god Brahma and the goddess Saraswati. The swan that serves as Brahma's vehicle, as the creator deity of the universe, bears a specific name, *Paramahansa*, meaning the supreme bird or supreme swan. The swan is also commonly positioned in pairs with the peacock as the dual vehicles of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge. In this context, the swan is interpreted as symbolizing the benefits of knowledge as a means of elevating spiritual quality and wisdom, while the peacock symbolizes the function of knowledge in enhancing dignity, wealth, and honor (Bhalla 2007).

In real life, swans are known for their ability to separate clean water for consumption from mud suspended within it. Swans also possess feathers that are not easily wetted by water. These

characteristics lead to the swan being interpreted as a symbol of wisdom and a representation of a pure soul, untainted by worldly impurities in the mortal realm (Ji et al. 2022; Rathore 2022). The natural trait of swans being difficult to put to sleep is also interpreted as a symbol of the human soul that remains alert and vigilant in exercising self-control (Kaulācāra 2005; Nath 2002).

The characteristics of swans inhabiting the Himalayan region differ significantly from those of swans found in Indonesia. The Himalayan swan (Latin: *Anser Indicus*) is known as a bird capable of inhabiting three realms in an extraordinary manner. This native Himalayan swan is able to live on land, in water, and in the air in balanced measure. Its ability to undertake migratory flights twice a year across the Himalayan peaks, reaching elevations of 8,849 meters above sea level (ZHAO et al. 2023), has led to its recognition as the only bird capable of flying above the peaks of the mountain range known as the "roof of the world" (Alerstam 1990; Bassuk 1987).

In Bali, figures of swans depicted with outstretched wings in flight can be found at the upper rear sections of *padmasana* and *padmasari* structures (figure 2).



Figure 2. Padmasana Sacred Architecture and Swan figure behind the Padmasana Structure

Garuda

Garuda is the name of a highly renowned hybrid creature, half human and half eagle, within Hindu teachings (Panda and Mohanty 2021). In the classical cultures of many civilizations, this mythological being is depicted as a valiant, muscular male figure possessing an eagle's beaked head, a pair of wings and an eagle tail, a pair of robust human arms, and a pair of human legs equipped with eagle talons (Gheran 2022).

Such representations of Garuda can be observed in classical visual arts across India, Nepal, Thailand, and Java (Bihanda, Kharisma, and Ananta 2022). His existence is prominently mentioned in the renowned mythology of the Churning of Mount Mandara. In this narrative, Garuda, as the son of the goddess Winata, strives tirelessly to free his mother from deceitful enslavement imposed by the goddess Kadru and her hundreds of serpent offspring. This role leads Garuda to become involved in the struggle over the sacred water of eternal life (*Amṛta*), sought by many parties (Sarma 2008). In one episode, Garuda is compelled to confront the deities in order to seize the sacred *Amṛta* to liberate his mother. At the conclusion of the story, Garuda succeeds in freeing Dewi Winata and is appointed as the vehicle of the god Vishnu (Sarma 2008). Garuda's involvement in conflicts with Kadru and her numerous serpent offspring also gives rise to the myth concerning Garuda's descendants, eagles, as natural predators of serpents to this day.

The existence of Garuda is also inseparable from the natural characteristics of Himalayan eagles. Eagles are capable of flying at altitudes of approximately 10,000 feet, or about 3,000 meters above sea level (Wilcox 2003). When compared with the elevation of Mount Everest, which rises to 8,849 meters above sea level, it can be stated that eagles are capable of flying around the mid-body region of the highest Himalayan Mountain.

The Balinese version of Garuda is easily recognized by its human eagle hybrid form, featuring widely outstretched wings, a bird's tail, and a pair of bird-like legs equipped with sharp talons. This figure is commonly encountered in various parts of traditional Balinese sacred architecture, such as at the rear of *padmasana* structures, positioned directly beneath the figure of a wing-flapping swan (figure 3).

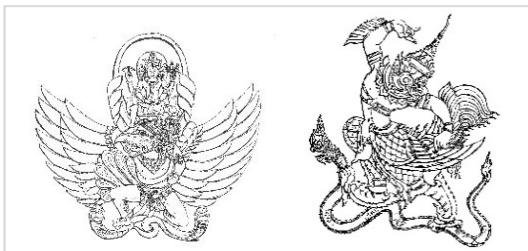


Figure 3. Garuda of the Indonesian tradition and Garuda of the Thai tradition

Winged Lion: Singa Ambara Raja

The third winged mythical animal figure takes the form of a winged male lion known in Bali as Singa Ambara Raja, which can literally be translated as “the lion king of the sky.”

This celestial lion figure is generally represented as a male lion seated in a posture that displays all four clawed lion legs. Its mouth is depicted open, revealing sharp fangs, while its eyes are rendered large and bulging in accordance with the distinctive style of classical Balinese sculptural art. On the lion's back, a pair of wide, upright wings extends, resembling the broad wings of an eagle. Such a complete depiction clearly conveys the lion's status in accordance with its title, namely as the sovereign ruler of the aerial realm.

The manifestation of Singa Ambara Raja is commonly found in Balinese Hindu sacred architecture as a decorative element at the base of *sesaka* or wooden structural pillars; at the upper corner sections of *bale kulkul*, which are structures used to hang sacred slit drums; and as a form of *pratima* (sacred object) or consecrated statue placed within the sacred space of a temple complex (figure 5).

Interpretation of the symbolic meanings of the four figures

The following section presents interpretations of the symbolic meanings of the four-winged animal figures recognized in traditional Balinese architectural art.

Interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the Naga Taksaka figure

There are several interpretations concerning the symbolic meaning of the Naga Taksaka figure in traditional Balinese sacred architecture.

1. Symbol of Clouds

At Pura Goa Raja, the statue of Naga Taksaka, together with Naga Wasuki and Naga Anantabhoga, is associated as three nāgas representing manifestations of the *Tri Murti* deities, tasked with bringing prosperity to the world and all its contents (figure 1). Anantabhoga, as the nāga manifestation of Brahma, plays a role in fertilizing the soil (Rosidi et al. 2023; Manna 2023); Wasuki, positioned as the manifestation of Vishnu, is responsible for purifying the element of water on earth; while Taksaka, as the incarnation of Iswara (Shiva), ascends into the sky and transforms into clouds in the heavens (Bakker

1993). These three cosmic nāgas work together continuously to form an unending cycle of life on earth (Noer and Pradnyawan 2024). As a result, the earth, previously described as dry and barren, gradually becomes increasingly fertile, prosperous, and hospitable for all living beings that inhabit it.

2. Symbol of Death

In the narrative of the death of Maharaja Parikesit caused by the venomous strike of Naga Taksaka, the story undeniably contains meaning concerning the power of death, which arrives at its appointed time and to the destined individual. No human being is capable of evading death.

3. Symbol of the Rainbow Bridge

In Eastern cultures, nāgas are often associated with all worldly elements related to water, such as rain, clouds, rivers, lakes, springs, rainbows, and even the ocean. This concept is embodied in many local beliefs regarding the role of nāgas as guardians of springs, protectors of the sanctity of river flows, rainmakers, and even as the creators of the rainbow arch in the sky. With regard to rainbows, in Bali, several regions of the Indonesian archipelago, and even in Oceania, folklore and belief systems have developed that interpret the appearance of rainbows as manifestations of nāgas (DeKirk and Zell-Ravenheart 2006; McKay 2001). The seven-colored arc in the sky is interpreted as a bridge from heaven that appears at certain moments as a pathway for the ascent of holy souls from the world to heaven, or for the descent of gods and celestial maidens from the heavenly realm to the earthly world (Gong 2005).

Naga Taksaka, as the nāga of death responsible for the demise of Parikesit, can symbolically also be interpreted as a pathway toward the heavenly realm, uniting with the Supreme Creator. Heaven, imagined as a realm of perfection free from worldly attachments, is often associated with the upper realm, the sky, or even clouds. The sacred path toward this “land in the clouds” is sometimes visualized as a beautiful rainbow bridge arching perfectly across the sky. However, in reality, no human being is able to ascend this imaginary bridge of seven colors during earthly life. A human being will only be “able” to ascend the rainbow and enter the realm of heavenly perfection and eternal existence once the inescapable destiny of death truly arrives.

Interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the Swan figure

In Balinese Hindu sacred architecture, the swan figure is generally interpreted through two principal meanings, as follows.

1. Symbol of Wisdom

Within Hindu and Buddhist teachings, the swan is interpreted as a symbol of wisdom or spiritual wealth. This concept aligns closely with the placement of the swan figure at the right foot of the goddess Saraswati as the deity of knowledge. The peacock, symbolizing glory, honor, and worldly wealth, is placed at the left foot of the goddess. The swan’s natural ability to separate drinking water from mud appears to have inspired its placement at Saraswati’s right foot.

2. Symbol of the Pure Soul

The existence of the swan as a symbol of the pure soul can be observed in its characteristic ability to remain dry despite living in water. Swans are also known as birds that are difficult to put to sleep and tend to remain constantly alert, much like the soul of a holy person who is always conscious and disciplined in self-control. The white swan named *Paramahansa* is also positioned as the vehicle of the god Brahma, the creator deity of the universe and the creator of all souls that exist within it. In this context, the swan may be interpreted as a symbol of a pure soul that is “light,” clean, and free from sin, enabling it to ascend toward the lofty and sacred heavenly realm and unite with the Supreme Creator.

3. The Symbol of Mokṣa

In Hindu teachings, the figure of a swan depicted in flight with its wings outstretched is interpreted as a symbol of the endeavor to attain mokṣa, namely the effort of the soul to unite with the Creator (Sugiarto and Pudja 1982). The figure of a swan with outspread wings is positioned behind the head of the principal sacred structure in Balinese Hindu architecture, namely the *padmasana*.

Interpretation of the meaning of the Garuda figure

The figure of Garuda embodies at least three principal symbolic meanings, as follows.

1. A Symbol of Liberation

In the mythology of the Churning of Mount Mandara (*Pemutaran Gunung Mandara*), Garuda may be interpreted as a representation of the effort

to liberate the human soul from the powerful bonds of worldly attachments. The national emblem of the Republic of Indonesia, Garuda Pancasila, is likewise said to be inspired by the spirit of the nation's liberation from the colonial oppression it once experienced.

2. A Symbol of Filial Devotion

Garuda's endeavor to free his mother, Winata, symbolizes a child's devotion to his mother. This narrative is manifested in the form of reliefs at Candi Kidal in East Java. The Garuda depicted at this temple symbolizes the figure of Anusapati, who honors his mother, Ken Dedes.

3. A Symbol of Strength and Protection

In mythology, Garuda is renowned for his extraordinary power, to the extent that he was able to penetrate the realm of the Dewata and seize the *Amṛta* without being wounded by their sacred weapons. Garuda's character, which is honest and helpful, also gives rise to his interpretation as a figure who protects humankind from danger. In the architectural arts of Balinese Hindu sacred buildings, the figure of Garuda is also employed as a decorative *tugeh* element that supports the main structural system of the roof in traditional Balinese architecture.

Interpretation of the meaning of the Singa Ambara Raja figure

The results of the literature review conducted did not reveal any significant information regarding a hybrid animal figure known as Singa Ambara Raja outside of Bali. The figure most closely resembling the winged lion of Singa Ambara Raja in Bali is found in ancient Tibetan culture, in the form of a hybrid male lion with an eagle's beak and wings. The existence of this Tibetan winged lion-eagle hybrid is rooted in the combination of two principal fauna inhabiting the foothills and slopes of the Himalayan Mountains in the Tibetan region, namely the lion as the king of terrestrial animals and the eagle as the king of aerial creatures (Beer 1999) (figure 4).

Singa Ambara Raja ("the kingly lion of the sky"), manifested as a winged lion, may be interpreted as a guardian of the sanctity of the heavens or the upper realm. Anyone who intends to ascend toward heaven must pass through a particular cosmic level guarded by Singa Ambara Raja. This symbolic interpretation appears to be well grounded, considering that in Balinese Hindu sacred architecture, the figure of Singa Ambara

Raja is customarily placed on the upper section of buildings (figure 5).

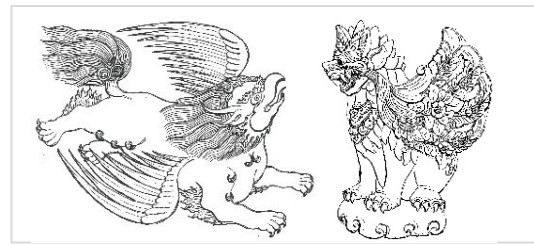


Figure 4. Tibetan Winged Lion and Balinese Singa Ambara Raja

Philosophical Background of the Four Figures Based on Their Character and Habitat

Winged Nāga: Taksaka

Taksaka does not exist in the natural world; therefore, a discussion concerning its original character in nature cannot be undertaken.

Swan

The symbolic meaning of the swan as a wise and sacred bird is inspired by its ability to separate drinking water from mud while keeping its feathers clean and dry despite contact with muddy water and ponds. Indigenous Indonesian swans are known to be flightless and are classified as poultry. By contrast, the wild Himalayan swan is known as a bird with the highest-flying capability, able to soar beyond the Himalayan Mountain range. This remarkable ability causes this species to be more closely classified as a true bird.

The exceptional capability of the Himalayan swan appears to have inspired its interpretation as a symbol of the exalted human soul, capable of reaching the most sacred heaven and uniting with the Supreme Creator. Based on these natural characteristics, it is indeed fitting that, behind the sacred *padmasana* structure in Bali, the figure of the swan is placed above the figure of the eagle (Garuda), which is "only" capable of flying across the body and neck regions of the Himalayan Mountains.

Garuda

In a segment of the *Samudera Manthana* mythology, it is recounted that the serpent clan, together with their antagonistic mother, Kadru, succeeded in deceiving and enslaving Winata, the mother of Aruna and Garuda, who later became known as the progenitor of all eagles and various species of birds on earth.

The character of the serpent, with its elongated body, creeping movement on the ground, and deadly venom, is often associated as a symbol of worldly bonds that enslave humankind through the glitter of materiality. In the *ngaben* cremation ritual processions of Balinese nobility and priests, there is a symbolic rite in which a selected priest releases an arrow toward a large effigy in the form of a giant serpent known as Naga Banda. This procession symbolizes the effort to liberate the soul of the deceased from the bonds of worldly existence that still bind (Balinese: *banda*) the soul as it journeys toward the upper realm (Wikarman 1997).

In line with mythological narratives, Garuda and present-day eagles are indeed known for their ability to seize and subdue even venomous serpents. In this context, Garuda symbolizes the spirit of liberation for humankind from all worldly attachments, akin to Garuda's success in freeing Winata from the enslavement imposed by Kadru and her serpent offspring.

Singa Ambara Raja

This Balinese version of the winged lion is presumed to be related to the Himalayan Tibetan version of the winged lion. In classical Tibetan culture, this winged lion figure is known as *Sengge Rkang-pa Brgyad-pa*. It is described as one of three hybrid animal figures that function as unifying symbols capable of minimizing disharmony between equally powerful yet opposing aspects of the universe (Beer 1999; 2003). The winged lion in this context represents a fusion of two dominant animal kings: the snow lion, which rules the terrestrial realm, and the Himalayan eagle, which dominates the aerial realm. The combination of these two "native" Himalayan animals produces a hybrid male lion with an eagle's beak and wings, depicted as capable of ruling two realms simultaneously, namely the land and the sky. Based on its form, it is highly plausible that this winged lion indeed functions as a guardian of a broader territory, extending from the foothills to the mountain slopes, both in the terrestrial and aerial domains.

In Bali, the figure of the winged lion is commonly placed on the middle or upper section of traditional Balinese buildings, such as *kori agung*, *candi bentar*, *bale kulkul*, *gedong*, and *meru* (figure 5).



Figure 5. Bale Kulkul and the Statue of Singa Ambara Raja as a Structural Support (Tugeh) in Balinese Architecture

Synthesis of concepts

The symbolic meanings of these four-winged mythological animal figures serve as guidelines for their placement at specific positions within Balinese Hindu sacred buildings. The symbolic meanings of these mythological animals are associated with the characteristics of several real animal species that inhabit the sanctified Himalayan Mountains and are closely related to Hindu and Buddhist teachings, which have since spread and been adopted by many nations worldwide, including those in the Indonesian archipelago, particularly Bali.

Guardians of the Upper Realm and Vehicles of the Dewata

Of the four-winged mythological animal figures discussed, two, namely Taksaka and Singa Ambara Raja, tend to be interpreted as guardians of a sacred area, specifically the upper realm or the path toward heaven. A somewhat different conceptual interpretation is embodied by the swan (*Paramahansa*) and the human-eagle figure (Garuda). These two-winged beings are more commonly understood as sacred creatures that function as vehicles (*vāhana*) of the Dewata.

The Meaning of a Pair of Wings

All four-winged mythological animals possess the ability to fly through the sky or the upper realm. This concept is also related to the imaginary depiction of heaven in Hindu teachings, which is portrayed as the celestial kingdom of the *Dewatas* in the sky. Within this context, it is entirely appropriate that all mythological figures and animals inhabiting this realm are also depicted as winged or capable of flight.

In the Balinese *ngaben* ritual, there exists a type of funerary tower in the form of a winged

meru structure. In this context, wings may also be interpreted as representing the journey of the deceased's soul ascending to the upper realm, the realm of eternity.

Conclusions

The four-winged mythological animal figures recognized within the knowledge system of traditional Balinese architecture are inspired by a syncretism between mythology and the natural characteristics of native Himalayan animals. These four figures embody the following symbolic meanings: a. as guardians of the upper realm (heaven) and/or as vehicles of particular deities; b. as winged creatures capable of flight, tasked with duties in, and/or originating from, the upper realm (heaven); and c. as hybrid animals possessing combined characteristics derived from the traits of their constituent animals.

In accordance with the symbolic meanings they embody, it is therefore appropriate that these four animal figures are placed within Balinese Hindu sacred architecture, particularly on the upper section of buildings.

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